



U.S. Department  
of Transportation

## Federal Highway Administration

# Rimini Road Project *Newsletter*

*Western Federal Lands Highway Division*

*Volume 2*

## Welcome!

This is the second newsletter for the Rimini Road project. The Western Federal Lands Highway Division is partnering with Lewis and Clark County and the Helena National Forest to answer questions such as which road improvements are necessary and what are the best solutions for this proposed project. This process however, is not possible without your help. Call us, write to us, and E-mail us to share your ideas and concerns.

The proposed project begins at the junction of US 12 and ends at the junction with the Chessman Reservoir Road. We will perform environmental and engineering studies over the next few years to help guide our design and complete the NEPA process.

Newsletters will continue to be sent at regular intervals to keep you informed. Anything special you'd like us to focus on? Contact Terri Thomas at 360-619-7700 and let her know what you want her to include in the next issue.

## Public Meetings Held

Two preliminary open house public meetings were held to discuss the Rimini Road improvement project.

On August 28, 2002, an open house meeting was held at the Spring Meadow Resources Building in Helena from 3 to 7 PM. The following afternoon another open house was held from 4 to 6 PM at the Rimini Community Center in the town of Rimini.

The purpose of the meetings was to discuss the reasons for the project and present some preliminary improvement concepts for review and comment. We had also hoped to meet the people inter-

ested in or affected by the project.

We had approximately 25 people come to each meeting to learn about and express their concerns toward the project

The open house meeting format allows for more of a "one on one" type of discussion so that individual concerns and comments can be better addressed. Many took advantage of this format and talked with the WFLHD engineers and the environmental specialist that were present.

Forms were supplied at the meeting to provide for written comments about the proposed project. These comments will be made part of the public record, and will be considered while choosing the final project alternative. It is not too late to provide us with your thoughts and concerns about this project. Please send your written comments to Terri Thomas at the address in the right hand box on page 2.

Please contact Craig Sanders with any questions on the project design alternatives or the project schedule.

More public meetings will be held in the future to discuss the project's development.



**Bridge on Rimini Road**

## Who Are We?

Our office is called the Western Federal Lands Highway Division (WFLHD) and we are a branch of the Federal Highway Administration. We plan, design and construct improvements to roads that access federally owned lands.

Much of our work occurs on or near National Forests, but we also improve roads for the National Park Service and the US Fish and Wildlife Service. Our office is located in Vancouver, Washington, but we perform work in five Northwestern states: Alaska, Washington, Oregon, Idaho and Montana.

### WESTERN FEDERAL LANDS HIGHWAY DIVISION

610 East Fifth Street  
Vancouver, WA 98661  
(360) 619-7700 (main office line)

#### Contacts:

Joel Petersen, Design team leader  
petersen@wfl.fha.dot.gov

Terri Thomas, Environmental Specialist  
tlthomas@wfl.fha.dot.gov

Craig Sanders, Project Designer  
csanders@wfl.fha.dot.gov

## The Proposed Project Alternatives

The four proposed alternatives, as discussed at the public meetings, may be changed based on engineering and environmental considerations and public comments. The alternatives being considered include:

*Alt. 1* – Rehabilitate, widen and pave the segment from MP 0.0 (jct of US 12) to MP 6.1. The curves in the first mile would be made safer to meet the current design standards.

*Alt. 2* - This is the same as Alt.1, except the curves in the first mile would stay as they are.

*Alt. 3* - The same as Alt. 1, except with a gravel surface.

*Alt. 4* - No action.

The first three alternatives include the replacement of three bridges. Also, the first mile is proposed to be widened to 28 feet and rest of the road to 24 feet based on the projected traffic volumes and Montana state standards. The existing road is about 20 foot wide.

## Q&A

### ***Q: What is NEPA?***

**A:** The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) was signed into law on January 1, 1970, in response to an overwhelming national sentiment that federal agencies need to take a lead in providing greater protection for the environment. This policy encourages the protection of all aspects of the environment, and requires federal agencies to use an organized, interdisciplinary approach to agency decision-making, one that uses the best science available while also placing value on the quality of the environment. There are three levels of NEPA project documentation, including Categorical Exclusion(CE), Environmental Assessment(EA)/Finding of no significant impact(FONSI), and Environmental Impact Statement(EIS)/Record of Decision(ROD). The EIS is the most intensive level of documentation, and also the most time consuming and costly. The level of documentation chosen depends on the type of proposed project.

### ***Q: Shouldn't you be doing an EIS instead of just an EA on this project to address NEPA concerns?***

**A:** Actually, the EA is sometimes required to *determine* whether or not an EIS is necessary on a project. For the Rimini Road Project, resource surveys will be conducted and data from other current Forest Service studies will be considered to assist in the determination process. Although it is not a requirement when an agency prepares an EA, we will include public comment and opinion in the process at the EA level for Rimini Road. Once all the available information is gathered, we will have to determine whether the proposed project will have the potential to “significantly affect the quality of the human environment” and thus warrant an EIS. If it is determined that impacts are not significant enough to warrant an EIS, the EA will be sufficient documentation to prepare the FONSI.

## More Q&A

***Q: Why can't you just pave the existing road the way it is?***

**A:** The existing road does not meet the current design and safety standards for the amount of traffic that currently utilize the road.

The road design standards used to develop a project include information such as what roadway minimum widths to use, the sharpest curves allowed and other roadway characteristics. The standards are chosen based on the type of roadway, amount of traffic, and the design speed. The American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials, and State and local governments have developed standards to be used in the design process.

Although the standards may seem excessive to some, there are many different levels of driver ability due to age, road familiarity and other variables. The standards are also developed considering driving under adverse light and weather conditions. It is our moral as well as legal responsibility to provide a safe roadway for all drivers.

***Q: Are you going to straighten and widen Rimini Road to become a high speed recreational highway?***

**A:** No, and we will purposely try to retain the overall character of the roadway corridor.

The average top width of the existing road is 20 feet. We are proposing to use the *minimum* State design standard of a 28 foot top width for the first mile, and then narrow to a 24 foot top width for the remaining five miles, due to a drop in the amount of traffic. We have proposed this to try and meet the safety requirements and still keep the amount of clearing, grading and property impacts to a minimum. As a comparison, a two lane rural highway would have a minimum design top width of 40 feet.

The first mile of the road has some sudden, sharp, and dangerous curves. In two of the alternatives, these curves are proposed to be made safer by straightening them to the minimum current design standards. The rest of the road would closely follow the same tangents and curves, allowing it to retain much of the same character.

***Q: Has the decision already been made to pave Rimini Road?***

**A:** There have been no decisions regarding what alternative will ultimately be chosen for this proposed project. Paving Rimini Road is one of the options, but currently we are still undecided on what alternative will be chosen for this project. There are resource surveys to be conducted that will afford a better view of the area in terms of wildlife and plants. There are engineering, water and air quality, accessibility and maintenance issues that must be considered in determining the final improvement action.

***Q: Are you concerned about the invasion of noxious weeds in the area, once construction begins on Rimini Road?***

**A:** The spread of noxious weeds is always a concern when constructing road projects. The issue of the potential spreading of invasive species by the construction activities will be addressed in the environmental process on this proposed project along with any mitigation efforts.

***Q: Are you including the scope of the project impacts to include the Upper Tenmile drainage?***

**A:** Currently, the Forest Service (FS) is gathering information on

wildlife corridor issues for other management efforts such as the Tenmile Watershed Analysis and the Forest Travel Plan, and these studies may also be useful for the Rimini Road Project. These data collection efforts throughout the watershed weren't generated by the Rimini Road Project, but will be useful in drawing conclusions about the effects in the area.

Additionally, the FS will be monitoring, inventorying, and conducting resource surveys which will offer information with which to draw useful conclusions about the indirect and direct affects that the Rimini Road Project will have on the area.

***Q: Are there plans for improvements to roads that are currently gated or used as foot trails?***

**A:** The proposed improvement project is from MP 0.0 to MP 6.1 in the existing road corridor. It will not address any other segments of Rimini Road or other roads or paths off of Rimini Road. Also, the Rimini project would not affect the access of those gated roads and foot trails that are currently accessible.

***Q: How will the proposed improvements to Rimini Road affect the work the EPA is doing to haul out the mine waste further up in the Ten Mile Drainage?***

**A:** The improvements to Rimini Road *will* allow for a more efficient haul out of the Tenmile drainage, but the funding for the Rimini Road project is not related to nor driven by the work the EPA is doing. Construction of the Rimini Road improvements *will* have to be coordinated with the EPA's work to ensure that a conflict between Contractors does not occur.

## ***Project Schedule***

*The Proposed schedule for the project is as follows:*

<b>Public involvement</b>	<b>Ongoing throughout project</b>
<b>Environmental studies and documents</b>	<b>Fall of 2002 to Summer of 2003</b>
<b>Geotechnical exploration and testing</b>	<b>Completed</b>
<b>Right-of-Way acquisition</b>	<b>2005</b>
<b>Final roadway design completed</b>	<b>Fall of 2005</b>
<b>Construction</b>	<b>Starting Spring 2006</b>

**TERRI THOMAS  
WESTERN FEDERAL LANDS HIGHWAY DIVISION  
FEDERAL HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATION  
610 EAST FIFTH STREET  
VANCOUVER, WA 98661-3801**